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Bay City City Hall
301 Washington Avenue
Bay City
Bay County
Michigan

HABS No. MI-218

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORICAL AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

REPORT
ON
BAY CITY CITY HALL
FOR
UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

AMERICA'S CITY HALL PROJECT

Name: Bay City City Hall

Location: 301 Washington Avenue
Bay City, Michigan 48706

Present Owner, Present Occupant, Present Use:

The building is owned, occupied and used by the City of Bay City. The building houses the general administrative offices of the City of Bay City.

Significance: Excellent example of municipal architecture in the American Romanesque style. Building constructed during 1894-97, and completely restored between December, 1977 and May, 1980. Bay City City Hall is on the State Register of Historic Sites and National Register of Historic Places.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. The Bay City City Hall is an excellent example of late nineteenth century architecture which shows influence, primarily in its prominent use of rounded arches, of the American Romanesque style.

The cornerstone was laid on May 30, 1894. A sum of \$500 was appropriated for the ceremony, but overrun by \$59.83. Thousands witnessed the program that featured a large parade, speakers, and an elaborate Masonic ritual to insure that the cornerstone was laid "square, level and plumb".

Hamilton M. Wright was the Mayor on March 22, 1897 when he said "... on the occasion of the first formal occupation of our new City Hall, I ask your permission to make a few remarks concerning this beautiful structure, a gem of its kind, a wonder of convenience and adaptation to public needs, unsurpassed in its conception, unequalled in its execution, a monument of the public spirit characteristic of Bay City, and in which all its citizens should take a just pride."

2. Bay City City Hall was designed by the local architectural firm of Leverett A. Pratt and Walter Koeppe. The business was started in 1872 by Mr. Pratt. Mr. Koeppe was admitted to the partnership in 1880. The firm designed many of the beautiful homes, business and community buildings in the City. Examples include: S. O. Fisher residence, Fremont School, C. E. Rosenbury Store, St. James Church, and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Pratt and Koeppe were well known throughout the State of Michigan. They designed numerous public buildings and churches in the State.

3. The building was built during the years 1894-1897 by the local construction firm of Henry Weber and Christopher Kircher. Bay City Stone Company was the primary supplier of Michigan sandstone used in both the interior and exterior. John H. Holmes did the mason work on the foundation and basement. Valley Stone Company provided the cut stone for the foundation. Tennant and Bate were the contractors for the carved stone. Foole and Hart had the contract for putting on the red tile roof.

Recorded is the accidental death of a boy roof worker who was a week short of his 12th birthday. Robbie Waldo fell from the attic while wiring the tile roof. His death led to enactment of the City's first child labor law.

4. Mayor Hamilton M. Wright on March 22, 1897 described the new City Hall as follows:

"We have now one of the finest samples of municipal architecture in the modern Romanesque style to be found in this country, and which will take a leading place in the history of municipal buildings. Beautiful in conception, artistic and finished to its smallest detail, convenient in arrangement, and admirably adapted to every need of the public service, it leaves nothing to be desired."

Bay City City Hall has not been seriously altered. The exterior of the building is virtually unchanged. Aluminum revolving front and side doors, and windows, were installed in 1979. Materials were carefully selected to preserve the appearance of the building.

Blue prints made from original plans are filed in the Engineering office in City Hall. Mylar positives have been made of these prints. Prints show front, back and side elevations, floor plans and roof details.

5. Approximately \$3.1 million was spent between 1977 and 1980 to completely renovate City Hall. All of the renovation work was done to preserve the original structure and character of the building. The restoration was supervised by John T. Meyer, Architect with the firm of John T. Meyer/Wigen, Tincknell and Associates, Incorporated.

B. Historical Context:

-- In 1889, during a booming period of growth and expansion, the citizens of Bay City found that their City facilities were antiquated, cramped and insufficient to serve the needs of a then very quickly growing community. In 1860, the population of Bay City had been only 800. By 1889, the population was over 35,000. Thus the new city needed new facilities. It was planned to build a new building which would serve a combination of purposes. It would be a city hall, a police station and a public library.

-- On April the 1st of 1889, a public vote approved the selling of \$40,000 in City Bonds to cover construction of the new facility. Originally there was a squabble over the site to be selected. In addition to the site which finally won out, other sites under consideration included the corner of Center and Jefferson, which is now Battery Park, and the block of Washington between Fourth and Fifth Streets. There were bitter fights over this, including at least one veto by one of Bay City's mayors. However, the site was finally selected and purchased for \$8,500.00.

-- In January of 1892, plans submitted by the architectural firm of Pratt & Koeppe were approved. They called for the structure to be of red or brown limestone with a black slate roof. Later economy moves changed that to the famous red tile roof and buff Amherst sandstone.

The boom period of 1889 turned into a recession in the early 90's, and as costs escalated, it was necessary to go back for three further votes of the public and for authorization from the State Legislature for authority to sell bonds. Because of the depressed economy of the times, the project won public support by providing substantial employment in the community. The City Council required that all workers for contractors be from Bay City, and that all materials, so far as possible, be purchased from local firms.

-- On May 30, 1894, the cornerstone of the building was laid with much public pomp and ceremony. The 180-foot bell tower was substantially constructed during 1894. At

that time, the City had a 6,000-lb. bell cast by a Baltimore firm for the tower. The bell cost approximately \$1,000.00 at a time when copper sold for 15¢ a pound. Final cost of the entire building was \$164,385.89.

-- Credit for the building was given at the time to Alderman Kroencke, who was the first to champion the cause of a new building and formulate measures for construction. He also led the public fights for approval of the various bonding issues.

-- On March 22, 1897, the Common Council held its first meeting in the new structure.

Additional information can be found in The Bay City Times, Sunday, May 18, 1980, special tabloid. Also, Catherine Baker, 2363 N. Weadock Highway, Essexville, Michigan, is in the process of writing a book about Bay City City Hall.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior:

The building faces east onto Washington Avenue and measures approximately one hundred twenty by two hundred feet. The basic construction material used in both the interior and exterior is Michigan Sandstone with granite and limestone used frequently in the arches and window lintels. There is a tiled gable roof with prominent central gables on each side. The building contains four floors. A tower, also built of sandstone, is attached to the southeast corner and is approximately one hundred eighty feet high. It contains a clock with separate dial faces visible from each direction. Both the clock tower and the building are readily visible to people coming into Bay City from any direction.

The exterior is characterized by the use of rounded arches over windows and doors and the use of windows in groups. The overall effect gives the structure form and unity. The main entrance is framed by a double Romanesque arch at the base of a large central gable and is decorated with an elaborate bas-relief worked in stucco. Directly above the main entrance is a porch framed by four smaller Romanesque columns. Single Romanesque arches are used over the doors on the sides of the building.

B. Description of Interior:

The building has four main floors; the layout of each is for municipal office use. The first floor at one time contained a police lock-up. This space has been remodeled to house the City's computer and data processing equipment. The second floor is the location of the Commission Chambers. This is a magnificent, three story tall meeting room. Fresco work has been repaired and reglazed, and decorative painting restored. A large tapestry hangs in the restored area. Third floor contains several office rooms, many have refinished fireplaces, all have oak woodwork. When the building was designed, space on the fourth floor was left unfinished. This floor was not used until 1980 -- after the building was completely renovated.

There is an attic or fifth floor -- this space contains ductwork, fire protection lines, electrical equipment and large amounts of insulation. A crawl space beneath the first floor received new plumbing lines, ductwork, fire protection systems and electrical wiring.

A highlight of the building is a central stairwell stretching from the first floor to the fourth floor. The stairway has two flights with one landing between each floor and features elaborate cast iron baluster topped with a brass handrail.

The central skylight over the main stairway has been rehabilitated, and the glass is now an insulating reflective glass to conserve energy.

The oak panelling all through the corridors has been stripped and refinished. Paint colors were selected to duplicate the original colors.

The original boiler was replaced with two new efficient boilers; and the boiler room, on the first floor, is packed full of fire pumps, air conditioning equipment and electrical switch gear. Two new mechanical rooms on the fourth floor house huge air handling units.

There are additional floors in the clock tower. The public is allowed on Floors 6 and 7 to view the City. The inoperative original clock was replaced with a new clock and carillon system with funds collected from a fund raising campaign in 1976.

During a day long "open house" held on May 18, 1980 approximately 10,000 people toured City Hall to see this successfully revitalized monument.

C. Site:

The "front" of the building faces east on Washington Avenue. A side entrance faces south on Tenth Street. The rear of the building faces west on Saginaw Street. The north wall is adjacent to a new parking lot for City employees.

Grass and shrubs on the front and south sides were replaced with new plants as a part of the 1977-80 renovation project. A new granite retaining wall was also constructed on the east and south sides. Landscaping, for the first time, was provided near the rear entrance (an entrance at grade designed for use by the handicapped).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings are located in the Engineering Department in City Hall.
- B. Early photographic views, both of the exterior and interior, are contained in books and files located in the offices of the Museum of the Great Lakes, Bay City, Michigan.
- C. Bibliography:

Bay City, Original Construction Plans Bay City City Hall, (n.d.), City Hall, Bay City, Michigan

National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form for Bay City City Hall, Michigan History Division, Department of State, Lansing, Michigan

The Bay City Times, Special City Hall Tabloid, May 18, 1980, Bay City, Michigan

Notes from Catherine Baker, 2363 N. Weadock Highway, Essexville, Michigan

Notes from John T. Meyer, Architect, 801 E. Midland Street, Bay City, Michigan

Prepared by:

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August 25, 1981